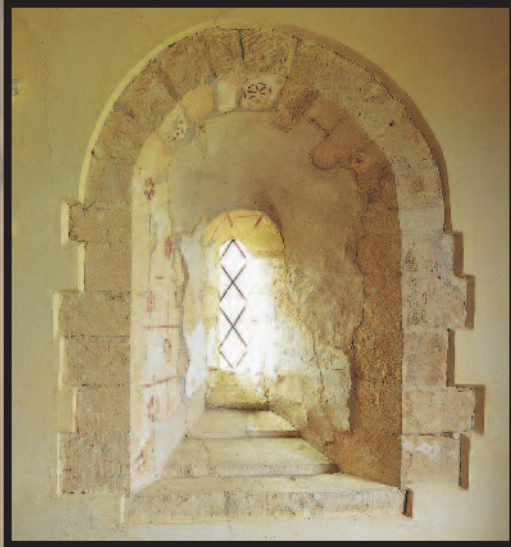


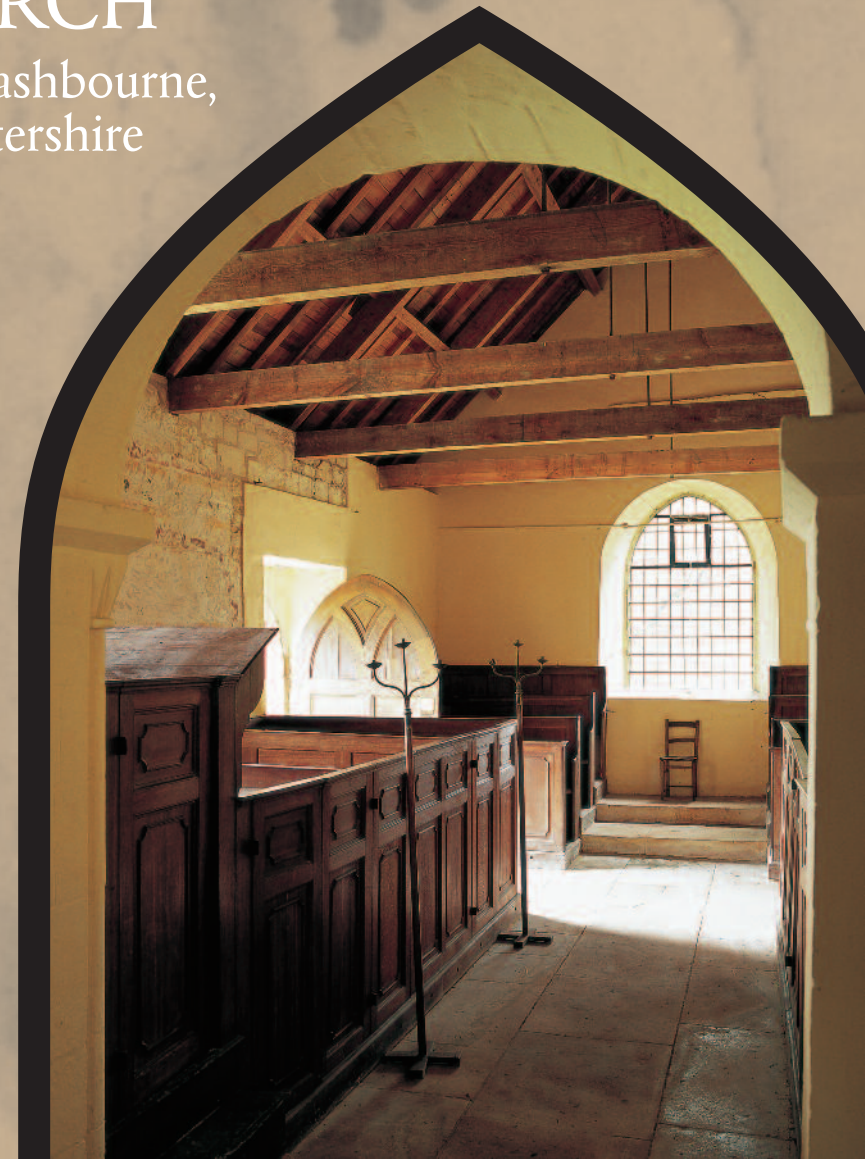


THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST



ST MARY'S CHURCH

Little Washbourne,
Gloucestershire



THE CHURCHES
CONSERVATION TRUST

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Little Washbourne, Gloucestershire

ST MARY'S CHURCH

by Andrew Pike (Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. Field Officer with The Churches Conservation Trust since 1994; currently Regional Development Manager. Previously an archaeologist with Buckinghamshire County Museum Service)

HISTORY

Little Washbourne is sparsely populated and its few houses are scattered over the surrounding countryside. The small size of its church suggests it has always been so. It has long been a chapelry of nearby Overbury; formerly a part of Worcestershire, it was transferred to Gloucestershire in 1844, though it remains in the Diocese of Worcester. The name means 'stream in the swamp', the stream being a small tributary of the Carrant Brook. It was sometimes known as Knight's Washbourne, after the knightly Washbourne family who owned the manor. Great Washbourne is less than a mile away across the fields.

In AD780 Offa, King of Mercia, is recorded as giving a parcel of land at Little Washbourne to the monks of Worcester. Subsequently the manor passed through various hands to the Sampsons at the time of Henry II and, from them, to the Washbournes – the first being Roger, mentioned in 1259. A later Roger became a coroner for Worcester – in 1347 the king ordered the appointment of another coroner due to Roger being 'so sick and broken by age'. The Washbournes and their descendants continued as owners of the manor until it was sold in the early 19th century.

*Front cover: Interior, looking south-west
(Ian Sumner)*

*Left: Reading desk, pulpit and box pews
(Christopher Dalton)*

Below: Exterior from the south (Ian Sumner)

Opposite above: Memorial to Sir William Hill (d.1786) (Ian Sumner)

Opposite below: Exterior from the south-east (Christopher Dalton)

EXTERIOR

The tiny church of St Mary (it measures 41 ft x 18 ft / 12.5 x 5.5 m), just off the Tewkesbury to Stow-on-the-Wold road, is surrounded by orchards and commands fine views of the Cotswolds and Bredon Hill. A chapel or church at Little Washbourne is first mentioned in 1240. The present building consists of a nave and chancel with a wooden bell-cote above the chancel at its junction with the nave. Dating mainly from the 12th century, it was considerably altered in the 18th. The north wall of the nave and much of the south is faced with ashlar stone, probably done in the 18th century; the rest of the church is built of rubble masonry,

likely to be original 12th-century work. The roof is of stone slates, last renewed in 1995. Concerns over the stability of the church in the late 19th century led to the addition of large sloping buttresses to the outside walls on the east, north and south sides. There were major restorations in 1912 and in 1961. A report on the church in the 19th century described, rather unkindly, the 'coarse features and badly-built masonry of the latter part of the 18th century'.

The south wall has a simple arched doorway lit by a graceful iron lantern and, to the east, a window, all probably of the 18th century. The west wall retains its three original shallow buttresses, the



INTERIOR

central one of which has been cut back to accommodate the sill of the window, similar in shape to that on the south wall. The east window of the chancel is again similar in size and shape whilst the deeply-splayed small window on the north side is the original 12th-century one. There are no windows in the north wall of the nave.

The small rendered bell turret over the west end of the chancel is supported inside by massive mediaeval timbers, rising from the floor. The east gable of the chancel is surmounted by a stone cross, perhaps of the 14th century.

Inside the church, the simple semicircular 12th-century chancel arch is supported on cushion capitals and attractively frames the communion table and the east window.

The panelled high box pews are very much a feature of the interior and are part of an 18th-century scheme of furnishing, which includes an elegant communion table of wood with a marble top and simple altar rails. The oak reading desk and pulpit, surmounted by a sounding-board or tester, are uniformly and very stylishly panelled with attractive inlay of a lighter wood. At the rear of the nave the box pews are replaced by a series of open tiered benches with panelled fronts similar in style to the pulpit and box pews.

The octagonal font is of about 1840.

The floors comprise stone flagstones. The mediaeval chancel roof has a braced collar-beam truss; the nave roof is of modern construction.

The only monument in the church is a damaged but pretty memorial in the chancel to Sir William Hill of London, died 1786, which includes his coat-of-arms.

There are indications of wall paintings throughout the church and especially on the south wall of the nave, where there appear to be a number of schemes superimposed one on another. The earliest may date from the 13th or 14th century and remains of a black letter text appear to be of about 1600. The splay of the north chancel





window is painted with a rectangular pattern of red rosettes and may well be contemporary with the window itself.

The turret contains a single bell, cast by Charles Carr of Smethwick in 1892 to replace a cracked bell inscribed 'made 1584'. Some time in the 1970s the earlier bell was taken to Gloucester Cathedral, though its present whereabouts are unknown. Two bells in the 'steeple' are listed in an inventory of 1553.

A number of brass candle holders provide the only source of artificial lighting.

RECENT HISTORY

The tiny population living in the vicinity of the church was unable to fund the cost of necessary repairs and maintenance. Consequently in 1976 St Mary's was vested in The Churches Conservation Trust. Since then the Trust has, under the supervision of Michael Bartosch of Cheltenham, carried out repairs to the building

including re-roofing, work to the windows, stabilising and repointing of walls, conservation of the wall paintings and redecoration.

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THE CHURCHES CONSERVATION TRUST

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Whatever the condition of the church when the Trust takes it over its aims are, first and foremost, to put the building and its contents into a sound and secure condition as speedily as possible. Then the church is repaired so that the church is welcoming to visitors and those who attend the public events or occasional services that may be held there (Trust churches are still consecrated). Our objective is to keep it intact for the benefit of present and future generations, for local people and visitors alike to behold and enjoy.

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Visitors are most welcome and we hope this guidebook will encourage you to explore these wonderful buildings.

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6 miles SW of Pershore, signposted from A4104 & A38; adjacent to Strensham southbound services on M5.

Pendock Church
5 miles W of Tewkesbury, off A438 (Sledge Green)

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Left: Interior looking east (Ian Sumner)

Back cover: North chancel window, showing wall paintings (Ian Sumner)